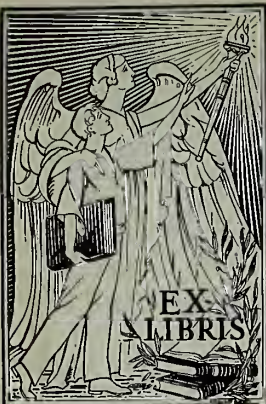


Blind Margot
by
Marie B. Williams
Youth's Companion, Feb. 21, 1878
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FOR THE BLIND INC.



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THE YOUTH'S COMPANION



NUMBER 8.

VOLUME LI,

PEERY MASON & CO., PUBLISHERS.

BOSTON, THURSDAY, FEB. 21, 1878.

No. 41 TEMPLE PLACE.

For the Companion.

BLIND MARGOT.

I found myself last summer in the little pine-woods settlement of Rosemont. I had gone there in search of health, hoping to obtain it by the virtues of a strong climate abiding in its neighborhood.

Rosemont could hardly have been called a village, so far apart were the fourteen or fifteen log huts which composed it. It owed its existence to a saw-mill, which employed ten or a dozen men, who had brought their families and settled on the hills near by, where it was healthy, they said, than on the low-lying swamp where the mill stood.

Rosemont was a picturesque, idyllic-looking place. The high swelling ridge on which it stood, was covered with the softest of green grass, and every house was surrounded by a hedge of the chokeberry tree, which gave its name to the settlement. The hedges were white with blossoms the first morning I walked out to survey my surroundings. I paused before one remarkably luxuriant hedge to examine it. An intelligent-looking man, with an axe on his shoulder, came out of the gate, and touched his hat as he passed me.

"You have a fine hedge here," I said.

"Well, yes, ma'am. I s'pose so, but it's next for virgins." Bill Edwards, he brought the chokeberry tree high on to ten years ago, and it's spread all over the settlement. I've calculated

cutting down



mention of health as I took the basket from Margaret's hands. Her lips parted in that same faint smile.

"I tried to make it pretty," she said; "I'm so glad you like it. Is it as nice as those in the big towns?" with a wistful look.

I told her no "big town." I had ever visited had over fashioned such a banquet. With a sudden gesture she took my hand and pressed it tightly to her heart.

"That's Margot's 'thank ye,'" said Mrs. Ellis, laughing. "You'll get used to her queer ways before long. Goodness knows where she picked 'em up!"

And a thousand times before the week was out, I echoed Mrs. Ellis's last speech. Where had the child picked up the refinement of taste and manner which characterized everything she did? Her speech was that of her uneducated associates, but her thoughts and yearnings soared far beyond their narrow comprehension.

Other girls have favorite romances and favorite heroes. But what was unusual, the Bible was Margaret's joy, and the carpenter's Son of Nazareth her hero. She had had none of the educational advantages which are given to blind, and could not read. But the people of Rosemont all read, and were willing to read about to her whenever she wished the shared narratives that were her favorites. She knew them by heart at last, and I frequently heard her repeating them over and over again to herself.

One passage in particular seemed a special favorite. This is its content: "And that day, having

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Rosemont was a picturesque, idyllic-looking place. The high swelling ridge on which it stood, was covered with the softest of green grass, and every house was surrounded by a hedge of the cherokee fern, which gave its name to the settlement. The hedges were white with blossoms the first morning I walked out to survey my surroundings. I paused before one remarkably luxuriant hedge to examine it. An intelligent-looking man, with an axe on his shoulder, came out of the gate, and touched his hat as he passed me.

"You have a fine hedge here," I said.

"Well, yes, ma'am, I'm proud of it, but it's a nest for varmints. Bill Edwards, he brought the cherokee here high on to ten years ago, and it's spread all over the settlement. I've calculated that nine dollars' worth of cherokee will kill ten dollars' worth of varmints, they won't touch it. They like the flowers, you see."

"I'm not surprised," I answered, as I gathered some of the exquisite little buds.

"I don't like 'em a bit," said a soft plaintive voice behind me. Turning quickly, I saw one of the loveliest faces I had ever seen, but one of the palest. A girl about fifteen years of age stood near me, having a tall graceful figure and regular features, but with a complexion of the dead whiteness of marble. The golden brown of her hair and the darker brown of the long curled lashes, which rested on her cheek,—for her eyes were out,—were the only coloring that relieved this statue-like appearance.

"If the lady will come with me, I will give her some sweet violets and pinks. Every one says they're beautiful, but I don't know," the plaintive tone of her voice deepening with the last words.

I looked inquiringly at the man.

"Margot is blind," he said. "But, ma'am, it's a positive curiosity to see the splendid flowers she raises herself. She can tell the weeds and grass just by the touch, and never mist a downy petal of her flowers by mistake. Why, she hasn't a bit of use for eyesight,—she does things so much better than those who have,—have you, Margot?"

The girl half-smiled; but the smile, like the voice, was full of pathos.

"Of course I would like to see Aunt Ellis, and you, too, Tom, and what you who are so good to me; but I'll have to wait, you know."

"She means till she dies," said Tom, lowering his voice. "She's always talking that way, is Margot?"

"But she doesn't belong to this place, does she? She isn't?" I hesitated, not knowing exactly how to word my question, so impossible it seemed that this delicate apparition, so carelessly having any part to do with these coarse, hard-handed sons and daughters of labor.

"You mean she isn't one of us, ma'am?" he answered, promptly. "No; twelve years ago she was picked up on the road."

"In the road?" I echoed.

"Yes'm. There was but one family living here then,—Jo Ellis and his wife. He'd been dead. Well, one night in January,—and a bitter cold night, too,—Ellis heard a carriage or a cart come tearing down the road. It seemed to stop a minute near his gate, and then to go on. He



—PERRY MASON.

thought it was a strange hour—high on to eleven o'clock—for my vehicle to be passing, so he marches down to his gate to look round.

"It was bright moonlight, and before he got to the gate, he heard a sharp sudden cry. He ran out, and there in the very middle of the road was a big blind rolling about. He got hold of it, and found it was a pair of fine blankets wrapped round a child two or three years old. It kept hollering, 'mamam! mamam!' and saying 'words in a kind of outlandish gibberish that he couldn't understand."

"He did understand, though, that it had been left there intentionally by some wretch, and so he and his wife—the best old woman in the world, ma'am—took the little foundling, and I reckon have done better by it than its own people would. They found out somehow its whole name,—Margot."

"And she was blind?" I asked, my whole soul full of pity for the girl standing there, her serene, patient face untroubled by the recital of her sad story.

"Blind! no, indeed, ma'am. Mary Ellis said she had the prettiest, brightest brown eyes she ever did see. But she hadn't been with 'em two days before she took sick with measles. It settled in her eyes somehow, and she's never seen since. She can't even raise her lids, you see,—paralyzed, the doctor says."

"It seems hard, but I tell you there isn't a smarter, pryer girl about her worse than Margot; and what seems strange is, she knows every place for five miles round, and she's a swifter walker than any of us. Why, we all forget things in her eyes somehow, and she's never sick since. She can't even raise her lids, you see,—paralyzed, the doctor says."

At this point the half-smile again lighted up the girl's face.

"Will you come now, ma'am?" she said; "the flowers smell sweeter when the dew is on 'em."

I followed her to a house situated at the edge of the settlement. I noticed she did not walk as the blind usually do, with cautious movements, but as swiftly and surely as if she saw. It was, with difficulty I kept up with her. Her quick eye told her that my steps were faltering, so she paused and waited for me.

"I had heard you have been blind," she said, apologetically, "but I forgot it. Very few can keep up with me."

The yard we entered was neither better nor worse than the others in Rosemont, but there was a border running to the front steps filled with lilies, violets, carnations, jasmynes, and every fragrant thrifter, old-fashioned dower I had ever seen. An old woman, with a kind face, sat knitting before the door on a bench.

"Come in, ma'am," she said, "unless you choose to sit out here while Margot gets you a pail. I reckon she brought you to see her flowers."

I preferred sitting outside and watching the quick graceful motions of the girl, as she moved along her flower-beds, culling some and rejecting others, as if she could see their defects.

"She won't have roses 'cause they're thorny," the old woman went on. "Poor thing! she likes flowers that smell sweet only; she calls the odors weeds."

"Well, it's a hard cross to be blind, but I often think Margot sees what we can't. She often cries out in her sleep, and then jumps up and says, 'Auntie, I've been in heaven, and I saw—oh, such beautiful things!' and then she cries fit to break her heart, because, she says, the darkness has come back. Well, God knows what's best."

"She looks delicate," I remarked.

"She starts when you sit stilly, though she's always been white like that. My old man used to think that the wicked folks who threw her in the road had tried to poison her, and that made her look as if she hadn't any blood. I reckon maybe she was rich, and they wanted to get her money. What do you think?"

Of course I didn't know what to think; but as Mrs. Ellis only wanted to talk of Margot, her strange history, and goodness, and usefulness, and as the subject was an interesting one to me, I encouraged it.

"Here she comes with your pail, and don't she fix flowers beautifully," she cried.

It was, indeed, an astonishing triumph of the sense of touch. The artistic combination of colors, the choice of leaves, the drooping ferns, were exquisite, and the bouquet was arranged in a basket woven of the smooth, glossy leaves of the geranium. I could not repress an exclamation of delight as I took the basket from Margot's hands. Her lips parted in that same faint smile.

"I tried to make it pretty," she said; "I'm so glad you like it. Is it as nice as those in the big towns?" with a wistful look.

I told her no "big town" I had ever visited had ever fashioned such a bouquet. With a sudden gesture she took my hand and pressed it tightly to her heart.

"Thank Margot's thank ye," said Mrs. Ellis, laughing. "You'll get used to her queer ways before long. Goodness knows where she picked 'em up!"

And a thousand times before the week was out, I echoed Mrs. Ellis's last speech. Where had the child picked up the refinement of taste and manner which characterized everything she did? Her speech was that of her uneducated associates, but her thoughts and yearnings soared far beyond their narrow comprehension.

Other girls have favorite romances and favorite heroes. But what was mine, the Bible was Margot's girl, and the carpenter's Son of Nazareth her hero. She had had none of the educational advantages which are given the blind, and could not read. But the people of Rosemont all read, and were willing to read aloud to her whenever she visited the sacred narratives that were her favorites. She knew them by heart at last, and I frequently heard her repeating them over and over again to herself.

One passage in particular seemed a special favorite. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another: that ye may abide in me, and my love may remain in you." "Can you read?" no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

"No greater love, no greater love!" she would repeat her lily-like face lighting up with a strange white glow.

One sultry afternoon in August I heard an eager hum of voices outside my room. Looking out, I saw a group of women standing in the street or road, gazing intently at a locality from which heavy black clouds were rising, and spreading over the sky. I went out and joined the group.

"It's a big fire sweeping down upon us!" said Mrs. May; "with the east wind 'blew in' it, and the high grass and pine trees like tinder from the drought! There's not a man on the place, and the mill moves a four miles off! Before we could get there and get it here, the fire'll be upon us!"

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"The wind's changing, thank God!" cried one. "We'll save our houses. But look—look yonder at Lisa Deery's house! It's afire!"

There was a piercing cry from one of the band of workers. "My baby's in there! I left it asleep. Oh, help me, help me to get her out!"

We all ran to the house, but it was a long distance off, and before we got there, the roof and chimney were in a blaze, and the heavy logs of which the house was built were beginning to burn. The mother sprang forward with a shriek, but the other women caught hold of her.

"You can't get through the door, Lisa, without being burned. You can't get near the house for the flames in the yard."

"She's huddled away, thank God! She won't know when her poor little baby's burned to death."

"The black jentry widow!" cried a voice I knew. Breathlessly excited, "I can push through."

"Go to the mill and leave all our plunder to be burned away," cried another.

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all the cost, and care, and labor of establishing such an institution as that.

After the exercises had closed, in private conversation, a gentleman named Mr. Mann upon his statement, and said to him—

"Did you not color that a little, when you said that all the expenses and labor would be repaid if it only saved one boy?"

"Not if it saves my boy," was the solemn and convincing reply.

For the Companion.

By Olive Thorne.

The old girl, who suggested it, I don't know by what processes of thought, for thoughts are queer, unaccountable things sometimes; but this I know, that Louis Harris, passing in an idle mood one day, by an old superannuated what's his name."

"The darkness has come back. Well, God knows what's best."

"Well, it's a hard cross to be blind, but I often think Margot sees what we can't. She often cries out in her sleep, and then jumps up and says, 'Aunt, I've been in heaven, and I saw—oh, such beautiful things!' and then she cries fit to break her heart, because, she says, the darkness has come back. Well, God knows what's best."

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said to her to go back and find her things. Louis had committed a wrong deed in the lifetime of her father, and was about to die, and she could only explain to sympathetic friends the face in the case, the wrong might be righted, and the unhappy spirit would depart and trouble them no more.

So they got up a select party of their own family, carefully gleaned from the members of the neighborhood, and strengthened by the presence of a celebrated "medium" from the city, who was in the habit of leading his body for the use of so-called spirits.

Requesting every one else to stay away,—which the people disregarded by coming in greater crowds than usual,—this party proceeded to the depths of the woods, and there effectually addressed the supposed sufferer. They told him, in most winning tones, that they were only friends who wished to help him, and that there was an accommodating gentleman, who would

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